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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to compare the grade point averages (GPAs) of sixth-grade students who had previously attended three consecutive years of open schools and of structured schools, measure the consistency of quarterly academic performance, and measure the consistency and adjustment of personal and social growth. Forty-six students from each background were matched for GPA at the end of the fifth grade; percentile on the Reading Comprehension Sub-Test and Mathematics Concepts Sub-Test of the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills; socioeconomic status; and, in 61 percent of the cases, sex. Students with a structured background had higher first quarter GPAs; there was no significant difference in GPAs in subsequent quarters; the cumulative GPAs for students with structured school experience were significantly higher; the student's background did not have a meaningful impact on the student expressing need for assistance in school adjustment; and teachers rated students from the structured background higher on items measuring school adjustment. (Author/IRT)

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AN INVESTIGATION OF STUDENT ADJUSTMENT FROM OPEN TO STRUCTURED SCHOOLS

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The educational process has taken many forms over the years. In an attempt to facilitate the learning process, we have used various approaches including didactic (1) expository teaching, (2) inquiry learning, (3) team teaching, (4) age grade organization patterns on student adjustment, (5) the middle school emphasis, and (6) the Open School Concept. Seidman (1975) found that approximately 700 open-space elementary schools are currently operating in the United States. Since the educational thrust is often indicative of both educational leadership and community demands, we can logically assume the acceptance of this approach by a large segment of the population; however, the overwhelming majority of our schools follow the more structured pattern of schooling. In view of the fact that there is a difference in the mode of instruction in the two approaches, do students readily adjust in their transition from one type of schooling to the other?

The concept of the open school does not always communicate the more profound meaning of the approach, namely, self-initiated learning due to curiosity, the fusion of subjects in the learning process, the de-emphasis of competition and the reduction of the fear of failure and the enrichment of learning through group activity. Seidman (1975) found that physical openness and climate openness are often used interchangeably; however, there is no data to support this position. Kourilsky and Baker (1975), Linder and Purdom (1976) describes the open classroom in terms of the range of independence in the learning process rather than mere physical movement of students. This is contrary to the findings of Morse (1976) which revealed that parents, teachers and administrators frequently mistake movement and interaction of teachers and students as representing the open school concept. Because there are differences in the emphasis of open schools and teacher expectations of pupil behaviors how do students with previous open school training adjust to structured school?

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The learning process is inihibited when students cannot adjust to the school setting. Failure to adjust to a new environment or mode of teaching may result in an increased level of anxiety, tension, a reduction in self-esteem, and an increase in self-distrust, thus reducing the learner's receptivity and level of functioning. Research by Gordon (1966), Coopersmith (1967) and Purkey (1971) supported the value of self-esteem, self-confidence, and a feeling of competence as significant factors in school adjustment. Crane and Jacobson (1976) found that an Adjusted-Study Program was helpful in minimizing the disruption of problem students who failed to adjust to the school setting. Research by Solomon and Kendall (1968) showed that teacher criticism was substantially higher in traditional classes, and noticeably lower in open school classes while the child's measure of misbehavior was only slightly higher in the same situation. Consequently, consistency in the child's behavior led to inconsistent teacher reaction to that behavior.

The Purpose of the Investigation

The investigator assumes that consistency in the mode of instruction strongly influences school adjustment since there will be more congruence between the student and teacher perception of classroom norms, standards and expectations. Because of the scarcity of a valid standardized instrument to categorize this concept, school adjustment in this study is defined as (1) consistency in an acceptable level of academic performance and (2) conformity to socially acceptable norms of school behavior which is identified by the absence of disruptive student behavior, or negative interpersonal relations in the school environment; therefore, the purpose of the study is to determine whether students graduating from Open Schools have more difficulty adjusting to structured classrooms than graduating students with a similiar mode of instruction. More specifically, the purpose of the study is to:

(a) Compare sixth grade - grade point averages of Open School students with sixth grade averages of structured school students over a one year period.

(b) Measure the consistency of quarterly academic performance.

(c) Measure the consistency and adjustment of personal and social growth

The following hypotheses were developed to measure the researcher's assumptions of the influence of previous open school experiences on students entering structured or traditional schools:

(1) Students with previous structured school training will have a higher G.P.A. than students with previous open school training for the first quarter.

(2) Due to student adjustment, there will be no significant difference in the G.P.A. for students with previous open school experiences and those with previous structured school experiences for the second, third and fourth quarters.

(3) The cumulative G.P.A. for students with previous structured school training will be higher than the cumulative G.P.A. for students with previous open school training.

(4) Students with previous open school training will express a greater need for assistance in school adjustment than those with previous structured school training.

(5) More students with previous structured school training will get satisfactory ratings from teachers on selected items measuring school adjustment than those with previous open school training.

Methods and Procedures

Ninety-two (92) sixth grade students and ten (10) sixth grade teachers were selected for the study. The number of teachers by disciplines were, Math - 2, Language Arts - 3, Reading - 2, and Social Studies - 3. The study was conducted

in an urban public school system. The school consisted of grades 6, 7, and 8, thus having a middle school classification. It has a student enrollment of 629 and a teacher-pupil ratio of 1:25.

Forty-six (46) sixth grade students with three consecutive years of open classsroom training (grades 3, 4, 5) were paired with forty-six (46) sixth grade students with three consecutive years of structured school training (grades 3, 4, 5). The students were matched on the following variables:

(a) The GPA at the end of the 5th grade

(b) The percentile of the Reading Comprehension Sub-Test Score of the C.T.B.S. (Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills).

(c) The percentile of the Mathematics Concepts Sub-Test Score of the C.T.B.S.

(d) Socio-economic status

(e) Sex (61% or 56 students)

The researcher felt that three consecutive years of schooling would minimize student bias in educational training that may be attributed to teacher personality. Volumnious data support the relationship of reading comprehension, sex, mathematics comprehension, and SES as relevant variables influencing adjustment to school. SES in this study was measured by the Hollingshead Two-Factor Index of Social Position (Myers and Bean, 1968).

All of the students were given questionnaires and instructions explaining the nature and purposes of the study. The questionnaire consisted of eleven (11) items which were taken from the Mooney Problem Check list form J for junior high school students. Some of the items were modified to make them more appropriate for this sample (See Appendix A). The students' responses were cross-validated with taped interviews of twenty (20) pupils (ten (10) structured - five girls and 5 boys) and ten (10) students with previous open school training (five girls and five boys).

Satisfactory progress in personal and social growth, was evaluated by using a teacher checklist. (See Appendix B). Studies by Bower (1971) and Harth (1971) support the validity of teacher identification in measuring student adjustment. The teachers were asked to place an "X" for unsatisfactory adjustment and a check (✓) for satisfactory adjustment by quarters. Thus each student was evaluated forty (40) times (10 items X 4, the number of quarters).

Analysis of the Data

A t-test at the .05 level was used at the end of each quarter to measure the relationship between the G.P.A. of pupils with open and structured school organizational background. The test was used for both core subjects (Math, Language Arts, Reading, Social Studies) and six other subjects which included the core courses: Physical Education and other courses such as Band, Unified Arts, or Home Economics. A t-value of 1.664 was required to show significance between the academic performance of the two groups. The t-values for the first quarter for the core subjects and for the six subjects were 2.187 and 1.867 respectively, indicating a significant difference in the achievement as measured by G.P.A. Students with previous structured school training had a notably higher G.P.A. than their open school counterparts. Thus, the first hypothesis was accepted. When the variables reading comprehension, a knowledge of mathematical concepts and SES are used as predictors of academic success as measured by GPA, the previous mode of educational training affected the performance of these students for the first quarter.

A comparison of the two for the second, third and fourth quarters did not reveal similar results. The t-values for core subjects and six subjects by quarters were: (1) - .607, - .468, (2) 1.096, 1.059, (3) .659, -943 respectively. Thus, the second hypothesis was also accepted. That is, there was no significant difference in the performance of the two groups for this period.

The cumulative G.P.A. was based on all six subjects because the total academic performance was evaluated in this school system to determine whether students passed or failed in contrast to some systems that dealt with promotional subjects (Core Courses) and electives which were not computed in the promotional average. A t-value of 1.877 was obtained, thus indicating significance. The cumulative G.P.A. for students with previous structured school experience scored significantly higher than their open school counterparts. Therefore, the third hypothesis was accepted to the extent that the variables used for matching were determiners of academic success in school. Previous open school training impeded the academic progress of these students for this year.

The fourth hypothesis relates to the students' perception of their need of assistance in making an adjustment to school demands. Since there were two groups and three possible responses (see instrument in appendix) a series of Chi-square test at .05 level were used to determine if there were significance in the differences of the responses of the two groups. A Chi-square value of 5.991 was necessary for significance. Since the highest value obtained was 5.342, the conclusion is that there was no significance in the differences of the responses of the two groups; therefore, the fourth hypothesis was rejected. Apparently the student's background did not have a meaningful impact on any particular group that was significantly different from the other.

As previously stated, school adjustment was also measured by using a teacher checklist. Total school adjustment on all items are listed below in the number and percent of students making satisfactory school adjustment by quarters.

QUARTERS	1		2		3		4	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Structured School Background (N = 96)	34	74	34	74	36	79	38	82
Open School Background (N= 46)	29	62	27	59	32	70	33	72

Thus, the fifth hypothesis was accepted. More students with previous structured school training received satisfactory ratings from teachers on the items measuring school adjustment than those with previous open school training.

The record also showed that the difference in attendance for the two groups was only five (5) days (171 to 166).

Another finding of the study that might be of interest to educators was revealed in the analysis of the G.P.A. by quarters (See Table I).

TABLE I

G.P.A. FOR BOTH GROUPS

QUARTERS	1	2	3	4	Cum Avg. Six Subjects
STRUCTURED CLASSROOM BACKGROUND					
(4) Core Subjects	2.043	1.961	1.983	1.972	
(6) Subjects	1.978	1.974	1.858	1.908	1.9708
OPEN CLASSROOM BACKGROUND					
(4) Core Subjects	1.679	2.071	1.754	1.842	
(6) Subjects	1.696	2.055	1.663	1.741	1.6473

N = 92

Students with previous structured classroom training had a higher G.P.A. than those with previous open school experiences in quarters 1, 3, and 4. Statistical significance was only found in the first quarter and also in the cumulative average. It is also interesting to note in the second quarter that students with previous open school training made notable gain over their performance in the first quarter and a slight gain over their structured school counterparts.

Other specific findings that may interest educators can be observed in the comparison of the G.P. A. for both sexes (See Table II).

TABLE II

G. P. A. FOR MALES

QUARTERS	1	2	3	4	Cum Avg.
STRUCTURED CLASSROOM BACKGROUND (N = 20)					
(4) Core Subjects	1.625	1.450	1.895	1.600	
(6) Subjects	1.767	1.670	1.538	1.663	1.629
OPEN CLASSROOM BACKGROUND (N = 20)					
(4) Core Subjects	1.387	1.363	1.312	1.412	
(6) Subjects	1.160	1.404	1.338	1.472	1.365

G. P. A. FOR FEMALES

QUARTERS	1	2	3	4	Cum Avg.
STRUCTURED CLASSROOM BACKGROUND (N = 26)					
(4) Core Subjects	2.365	2.615	2.605	2.259	
(6) Subjects	2.393	2.202	2.125	2.099	2.233
OPEN CLASSROOM BACKGROUND (N = 26)					
(4) Core Subjects	2.288	2.00	2.096	2.298	
(6) Subjects	1.837	1.90	1.893	1.946	1.865

The data shows that:

(1) Females, regardless of previous type of school training, had a considerably higher G.P.A. than their male counterparts in both core subjects and total subjects for every quarter in the school year.

(2) Males with previous structured school training had a higher G.P.A. than their male counterparts for every quarter in the school year, thus, a higher cumulative average.

(3) Girls with previous structured school training had a higher G.P.A. than their female counterparts for every quarter in the school year, thus, their cumulative average was also higher.

Implication for Education

To the extent that SES, reading comprehension, the ability to comprehend mathematical concepts, and sex for 61% of this sample, were determiners of school adjustment including academic success; previous open school training served as an impediment to the growth of this sample for one year; therefore, the following recommendations appear to be valid:

(1) Schools must exercise caution in implementing new programs or new approaches to learning to avoid a long range impact that may obstruct or delay the students' progress.

(2) More emphasis is needed in articulation between elementary and middle school training programs and processes to enhance continuity in the educative process.

(3) Provisions must be made to facilitate the transition from the elementary school to the middle school, particularly when the previous school training deviates significantly from the future mode of the educational thrust.

(4) There must be a specificity of classroom norms expected by teachers when pupils with very different previous educational training enter their classes. This would facilitate school adjustment and encourage personal and social growth.

(5) A follow-up study of the students with previous open school training should be conducted to determine the length of time needed for them to perform academically on an equal basis with other students.

(6) A random sample of students with a large "N" size should be used to determine if these findings will be supported.

At a time when there is frequent criticism of public education, educators cannot afford to ignore the evidence available which suggest additional investigation and change or modification in new programs that may not be helpful to all students.

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APPENDIX A
STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Place a Check (✓) in the Appropriate Column	Adequate Assistance	More Assistance Needed	No Assistance Needed
A. Adjusting to Classroom Policies			
B. Learning how to study			
C. Interpreting difficult textbooks or other materials			
D. Making oral reports in Class			
E. Participating in class discussion			
F. Understanding class restrictions Understanding class assignments			
G. Correcting mistakes made in class			
H. Getting along with teachers			
I. Getting acquainted with other students			
J. Getting acquainted with various school activities such as athletic teams, school clubs, etc.			
K. Developing Self-confidence			

APPENDIX B

TEACHER CHECKLIST

SCHOOL ADJUSTMENT - SOCIAL TRAITS - HABITS - ATTITUDES

12.

PLACE A CHECK (✓) BY EACH QUARTER IF THE TRAIT WAS SATISFACTORY OR BETTER.
PLACE AN "X" BY EACH QUARTER IF THERE IS A NEED FOR IMPROVEMENT.

BEHAVIOR	SUBJECT	QUARTER			
RESPECTS AUTHORITY	1. MATH	1st____	2nd____	3rd____	4th____
	2. LANG. ARTS				
	3. READING				
	4. SOC. STUD.				
FOLLOWS DIRECTIONS	1. MATH	1st____	2nd____	3rd____	4th____
	2. LANG. ARTS				
	3. READING				
	4. SOC. STUD.				
USES TIME WISELY	1. MATH	1st____	2nd____	3rd____	4th____
	2. LANG. ARTS				
	3. READING				
	4. SOC. STUD.				
ASSUMES HIS SHARE OF RESPONSIBILITY	1. MATH	1st____	2nd____	3rd____	4th____
	2. LANG. ARTS				
	3. READING				
	4. SOC. STUD.				
RESPECTS THE RIGHTS AND PROPERTY OF OTHERS	1. MATH	1st____	2nd____	3rd____	4th____
	2. LANG. ARTS				
	3. READING				
	4. SOC. STUD.				
COMPLETES CLASS ASSIGNMENTS	1. MATH	1st____	2nd____	3rd____	4th____
	2. LANG. ARTS				
	3. READING				
	4. SOC. STUD.				
COMPLETES HOME ASSIGNMENTS	1. MATH	1st____	2nd____	3rd____	4th____
	2. LANG. ARTS				
	3. READING				
	4. SOC. STUD.				
WORKS WELL INDEPENDENTLY	1. MATH	1st____	2nd____	3rd____	4th____
	2. LANG. ARTS				
	3. READING				
	4. SOC. STUD.				
WORKS WELL IN GROUPS	1. MATH	1st____	2nd____	3rd____	4th____
	2. LANG. ARTS				
	3. READING				
	4. SOC. STUD.				
GETS ALONG WELL WITH OTHERS	1. MATH	1st____	2nd____	3rd____	4th____
	2. LANG. ARTS				
	3. READING				
	4. SOC. STUD.				